



## **Fact-Finding Report: Commerce Undergraduate Society (CUS) 'Pocahontas' Chant**

October 15, 2013

Following September 17 reports of a chant called "Pocahontas" at the 2013 CUS FROSH orientation organized by the student leadership of the Commerce Undergraduate Society (a constituency of the Alma Mater Society), the University's Vice President Students and the Dean of the Sauder School of Business appointed a team to look into this incident.

### **Fact-Finding Process**

The two-person team undertook their work the week of September 23, interviewing nine first year students (from a group of 18) and the three FROSH leaders who are Sauder senior year students. These students were part of a FROSH activity group named 'Pocahontas'. The interviews were conducted with an AMS Advocacy Office representative present. No further interviews were required as the facts were consistent as a result of the data gathered from this cross section of students.

### **What We Discovered**

The FROSH student leaders for the group selected the 'Pocahontas' group name as part of the 2013 CUS FROSH Disney movie theme, during the planning for the FROSH orientation events in late summer. The 'Pocahontas' chant was created by the group's FROSH leaders, with assistance from some of the first year participants during FROSH orientation.

The chants used by the 'Pocahontas' group were:

- "Pocah, Pocah, Pocah, Pocahontas – white man took our land, sacrifice (family name of group leader representing John Smith in the skit)."
- "Pocahontass, ass, ass, ass"

The chant was based on the storyline from the 1995 Disney animated feature film that has been criticized for inaccurate portrayal of history and the perpetuation of Aboriginal stereotypes. On one occasion, students encircled one of the group leaders and repeated the chant, "white man took our land", while banging on the floor. Some students were in costume, wearing face paint and feathers.

Although students involved say they did not intend any harm and no first year student or group leader raised a concern or objection about the name of the group or the chant, it is clear these students did not take into consideration the derogatory Aboriginal stereotypes or the greater historical context of their group name and chant. The students did not understand or recognize that their actions would be insulting, demeaning and hurtful toward the Aboriginal community. Upon reflection, students expressed regret and

some students commented they now had a greater understanding as a result of their participation in the Truth and Reconciliation events and this fact-finding process.

All students involved were asked to read and reflect on the response from First Nation Studies regarding the Pocahontas chant: <http://fnsp.arts.ubc.ca/2013/09/19/fnsp-responds-to-allegations-of-anti-aboriginal-frosh-chants/>.

## **Discussion**

Given students' need and interest, further educational opportunities would be useful. Moreover, this incident highlights the need for the University to revisit how we educationally support and work with the Alma Mater Society and the Undergraduate Constituencies on the development, planning, and delivery of orientation events, to ensure that student leaders involved understand what it means to provide an inclusive, safe, and welcoming orientation experience for all students.